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Andrew Martinez

Coil of nudibranch eggs — page 168

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KING OF SNAKES, *the basilisk (left) was the first Jenny Haniver to be published and identified as a fake. Through the centuries, monsters have been manufactured by cutting and distorting rays, skates, and chimaeras. The fish's eyes in this Garadiavolo (right) are not above its mouth, as they appear to be on the monster, but on the other side of the animal (insert).*

Right: Harry Lebelson

Garadiavolo
The devil monster hoax

by HARRY LEBELSON *and* BETTE RUSH

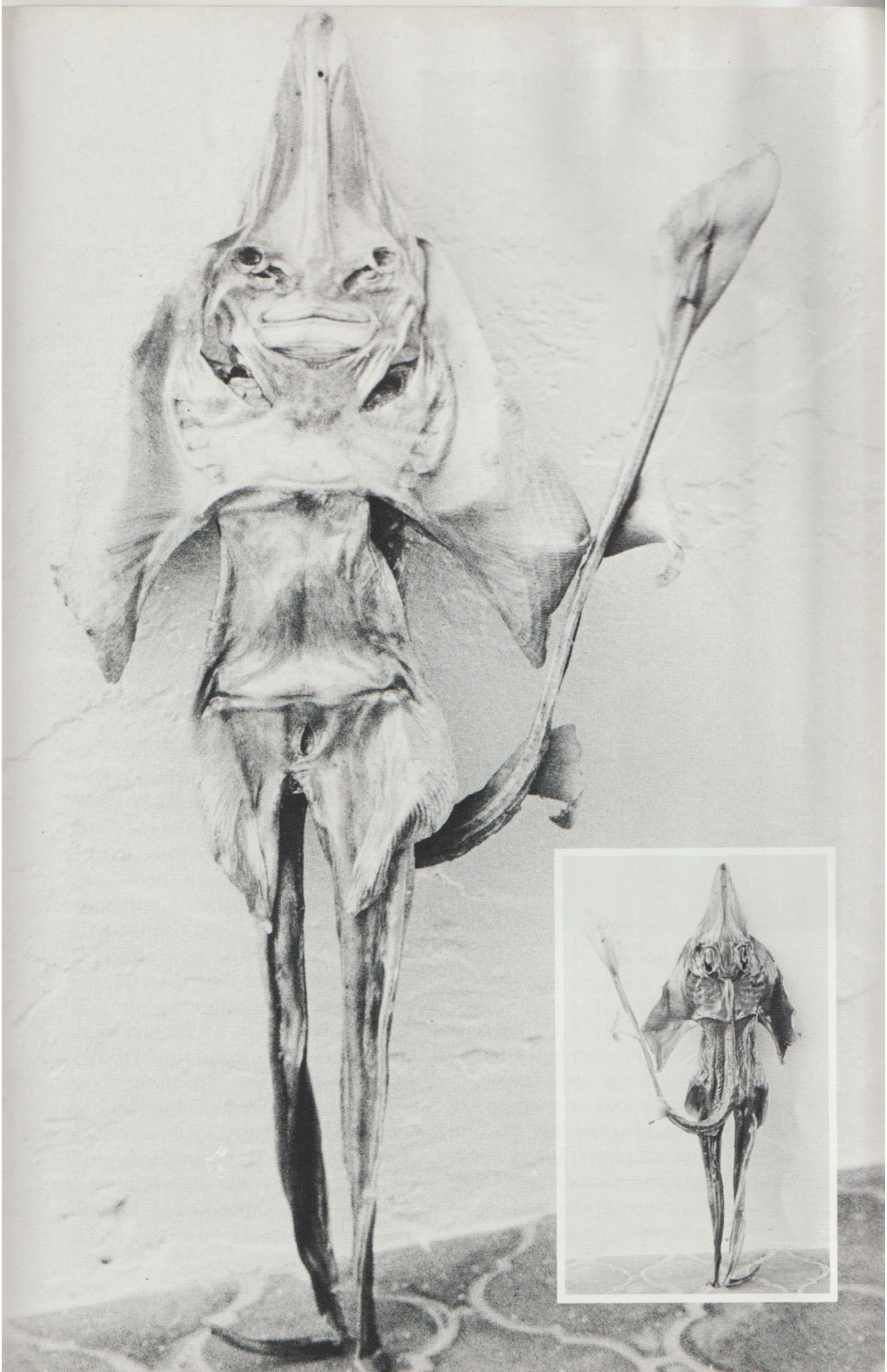
FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, stories of sea monsters have captured the imagination of seafarers and landlubbers alike and, to this day, questions arise as to their validity.

Although actual sea creatures have inspired certain monster stories, over the centuries there also have been man-made monsters created by talented hoaxsters strictly for commercial purposes. These objects are called Jenny Hanivers (origin of name unknown). Although there is no way of telling just when Jenny Hanivers first appeared, the first recorded reference to them was a woodcut of a basilisk, a type of lizard regarded as the king of all serpents, in the 1558 book *Historia Animalium.* The author, Konrad Gesner, said that he saw such an imitation monster in Zurich, Switzerland in the shop of a vendor of quack medicines. The owner claimed the sea monster to be a basilisk, but there was no doubt in Gesner's mind that it had been fashioned from a ray fish. He had published his woodcut of the animal for the express purpose of revealing it to be a hoax. During that time period, the fake sea monsters were fashioned for sale throughout major Mediterranean cities along the coast.

Other examples of Jenny Hanivers have been documented in natural history textbooks and sea-monster anthologies from the late 1500s to the present.

Fish face

In 1929 and 1933, two contrived specimens of sea monsters appeared in the United States. Their creators were two fishermen who had fashioned the creatures solely because they thought the ray fish resembled a



Ed Thompson/Miami Seaquarium

RAW MATERIAL *for a monster, an Atlantic guitarfish (*Rhinobatos lentiginosus*) can be cut, dried, and varnished to produce a Jenny Haniver. By manipulating its shape and natural features, a creature with wings, legs, and a hideous face can be constructed.*

human face. This similarity led to their embellishing the fish's appearance until it took on monsterlike characteristics. In another case, in 1969, a blatantly phony Jenny Haniver photograph was distributed by a national agency as a picture of a genuine sea monster.

The incident that created the most publicity, however, took place in Puerto Rico as recently as 1974. On September 28, the headline of *The San Juan Star* newspaper screamed across the page "Invasion of the Garadiavolos."

The story allegedly began in a slimy black lagoon hidden within a dense jungle of mangrove in Fajardo, Puerto Rico. Here Alfredo Garcia Garamendi, physical education teacher and skin-diving buff, claimed to have had an encounter with a humanoid sea monster he called the Garadiavolo (devilfish). The powerful creature with razor-sharp teeth met Garamendi beneath the mud-infested waters in a life-and-death struggle. Garamendi claimed the 3½-foot monster attempted to choke him by wrapping its tail around his neck. The creature was extremely powerful and Garamendi, himself over 6 feet tall, could not free himself from its grip. Using all his strength,

3½ feet = 1.1 meters; 6 feet = 1.8 meters

however, he stabbed the devil creature repeatedly until it went limp.

Garamendi sent the creature's body to Florida where it was preserved by a taxidermist. In early August 1974, the Garadiavolo was first introduced to the world at a crowded press conference. Later that month, it was moved to a laboratory tank and immersed in water. It was destroyed, however, in a sudden explosion. All that remained was ashes.

Tony Daubon, a natural science photographer and biology student at the University of Puerto Rico and acquaintance of Garamendi, claimed to have analyzed miniscule tissue samples left among the ashes of the monster. He stated, "I've never seen similar cell structures in my experience. I've been studying animal and fish cells through microscopes for 3 years and these are quite unusual."

No creature in the Black Lagoon

The Garamendi legend was quickly picked up by the media. *The San Juan Star* gave the story 4½ pages in its special supplement "Portfolio." In fact, on November 14, 1974, staff editor Bob McCoy accompanied Garamendi, Daubon, and Salvador Freixedo, a parapsychologist, on a safari to the Black Lagoon in search of another Garadiavolo. The trip was unsuccessful.

Not long after that, letters to *The San Juan Star* from concerned readers implied that Garadiavolo was a hoax and told of the existence of these man-made monsters throughout the world. But Garamendi vigorously defended his original claim that his monster was a genuine specimen and that the others were fakes. In his book, *Los Garadiavolos*, he argued that his Garadiavolo was "a creature from another dimension put on earth for unknown reasons." It was the opinion of many who owned these man-made monsters, however, that they were created by the altering of guitarfishes, chimaeras, skates, and rays.

To make a monster

In accordance with that view, Dr. Richard Robins, professor of ichthyology at the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, feels that the Garadiavolo is indeed a clever fabrication. "Guitarfishes, found commonly in the Caribbean and along the U.S. East Coast, are dried and cut up to create the devilish appearance of the Garadiavolo." He went on to say, "This fish, with its tapered body is an ideal source to work with. The spinal cord and fins are cut in the center to create legs and the spearlike tail of the monster. Its pectoral and pelvic fins which are anatomically joined are cut and separated to form the wings. The humanoid face is in reality the nostrils and mouth of the guitarfish." The illusion of eyes is created by the animal's nostrils which appear as two holelike eyes on the same side of the face. In reality, however, the actual eyes of the creature appear on the opposite side of the head.

Although stories of many sea creatures are strange but true, fertile imaginations probably will continue to devise new Jenny Hanivers for years to come. □